

Australian High Country Owls

by Jerry Olsen

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Owls have an uncanny ability to intrigue us, whether through their regular nightly rituals, particularly during their breeding season, their persistent calling in the depths of the night, their elusiveness (causing subsequent frustration on our part while trying to find them) or simply because of their mystery and awe. Owls, for whatever reason, hold a very special place in the hearts of many people.

As public awareness about owls increases, so do the questions about these cryptic creatures. Jerry Olsen, through his book *Australian High Country Owls*, has provided extensive information and knowledge on both Australian and international owl species. The 366 page book provides detailed accounts from Jerry's own experiences as well as incorporating relevant scientific literature. The book focuses primarily on Australian *Ninox* species and how these compare to their international counterparts. This comparison is extremely valuable, as highlighted in Jerry's preface, because much of the owl research undertaken in Australia is based on protocols and data interpretation from overseas.

The book contains 41 chapters, all of which are very well written and easy to read. The first few chapters contain essential background information such as what an owl is, owl taxonomy, in particular *Ninox* species followed by the Southern Boobook as a *Ninox* example. After providing background information such as this, the book delves into the many aspects of studying owls, including how to locate, trap and handle these often difficult creatures on which to undertake research!

Detailed information and accounts of diet and hunting, breeding and conservation are also provided. These sections are extremely valuable as they draw heavily on both the scientific literature and the author's own research experiences. Summary tables, figures and photographs are well used to provide information and highlight visual points. The photography is of extremely



high quality and certainly provides further insights into the mystery associated with these birds.

The final section of the book is titled Wallacea and provides a detailed account of owls on the island of Sumba and the discovery of a new owl species, the Little Sumba Hawk-owl. An extensive reference list is also provided along with appendices on Australian owls and rehabilitating injured or orphaned owls.

Jerry Olsen is one of Australia's leading owl researchers and has many years of experience working with these birds. This expertise and experience shines throughout this book, with interesting and accurate information. The book is a must have for anyone interested in learning more about these mysterious and amazing creatures.

Dr Raylene Cooke
School of Life and Environmental Sciences
Deakin University – Melbourne Campus
221 Burwood Highway
Burwood Vic 3133